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ABSTRACT

The author contends that the best form of educating
and instructing hard of hearing students in Germany is in segregated
schools or at least in separate sections of schools. Problems with
integration are pointed out, and the importance of training family
counselors and nursery school educators is stressed. (SBH)

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THE FORGOTTEN CHILD - THE NEEDS OF THE HARD OF HEARING CHILD

PAPER II

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How University Training Centres Can Develop Coordinated Interdisciplinary Program to Meet the Unique Needs of Hard of Hearing from an Early Age

In Germany the education of the hard of hearing has a long tradition. It was in 1815 that the Austrian Guggenmoos said that the hard of hearing pupils, educated in schools for the deaf, become deaf people. They become totally deaf in all their behaviour not by the law of nature but by the wrong education they get. In 1898 a physician, Hartmann, reported upon his experience that hard of hearing children, instructed in regular schools, showed severe educational retardations. This judgement is now verified by the investigation Quigley made with modern scientific methods. As a result of these arguments it is believed in Germany that the best form of educating and instructing hard of hearing pupils is to do this in segregated schools for hard of hearing - or at least in separate sections of schools for hearing impaired. There are only few hard of hearing children mainstreamed, that is instructed in regular school classes. Mainstreaming in Germany is exercised mainly in sparsely populated areas with traffic difficulties and is considered by most of the teachers and the school authorities as a makeshift.

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Nowadays the central problem in the development of a theory on education of the hard of hearing in Germany is to overcome the dominant influence of the education of the deaf. The education of the deaf is a fascinating thinking model because of two facts: (1.) Total deafness is a much more impressive handicap than defective hearing. To normal hearing people - to which the most of the teachers of the hard of hearing belong - it is much easier to imagine to hear nothing than to hear something in a quite different manner. (2.) Moreover hard of hearing persons are hearing so extremely different. So total deafness is much easier to comprehend than lower degrees of hearing impairment.

In Germany special education in its beginning was called "Heilpädagogik", which means curative education. The teachers at schools for handicapped often thought of themselves to do a para-medical job by attending the children in a special manner. Therefore it was natural for many teachers of the deaf to dress like doctors. But times have changed and the teachers learned by and by that their work is quite different from that of physicians. They have to teach and to educate and not to cure their pupils. A child being hard of hearing will be hard of hearing as long as it lives and the teachers have to accept this as a fact and they have to teach their pupils as well as their parents to accept this. At the last meeting of the union of the teachers of the deaf and of the hard of hearing in Germany (BDT) there we had a very interesting discussion between the teachers and the parents of hearing impaired children. Parents accused the teachers of misinformation, because teachers always told them about social integration which their children will attain, but they neglected the fact that social integration is limited because the hearing defect imposes boundaries which

cannot be overcome. The result of this discussion was that social integration will never be possible in the broadest sense of this word. For example it is not fully attainable in the field of vocation, for even hard of hearing workers with the best vocational training and highly developed linguistic skills will never be able to become leaders of a greater team of workmen because their ability to phone is not sufficient. Therefore social integration cannot be the sole aim, education of the hard of hearing has to obtain. Moreover the education of the hard of hearing has to prepare these pupils for a life as a hearing impaired person, who looks after his own interests in cooperation with other persons being hard of hearing. Mainstreaming could promote two dangers in the education of the hard of hearing: (1.) It could strengthen the illusion of the parents as well as of the pupils that they can overcome the hearing deficiency so that the hard of hearing become absolutely equal to normal hearing people. This danger is present in the segregated school also. In a paper of the Breakthrough Trust I found the sentence: "It is not uncommon, that children grow up with the idea that, when they are as old as mother, father, teacher, etc., they too will be able to hear." (2.) The hard of hearing children could become isolated in an overwhelming mass of pupils being not handicapped. Thus these hard of hearing children may be impeded in getting a realistic image of themselves. While educating hard of hearing children one has to keep in mind two aims, which are equally important: (1.) to integrate them in a society of mostly not handicapped people and (2.) to enable them to live their own life as a member of an emancipated group of hard of hearing within this society.

The special education of the hard of hearing should begin at the earliest age possible. It is of detrimental influence on the educational possibilities that generally hard of hearing children are identified at an older age than deaf children. The less severe the hearing loss is, the later the hearing defectiveness is detected.

The parents are those who need help at first, not the handicapped child. Concerning this help, I do not believe in rigid programs. I believe much more in the abilities of well trained experts, which can be more flexible than any program can be. The person having the first contact to the parents has to find out the specific problems of them. Those problems have to be dealt with first, before a direct influence on the education of the child is possible. Perhaps it is helpful to the parents to get information about the origin of the hearing defect, about its consequences for life and development of the child. Many parents are afraid of the future of their child and it may be a great help to them to show them how hard of hearing children learn at school and how they live as adults. Maybe the parents are worried about the financial consequences of the handicap and have to learn who pays for the hearing aids, the home training, etc. Many families must be encouraged to contact their relatives again, their friends and their neighbours. It is important for the parents to talk to other parents of hard of hearing children and to discover that they have similar problems. They have to learn what institutions will grant help to them and their child and of what kind this help is. Thus it may be possible to normalize the reference of the parents to their child more and more and to prevent overprotection as well as neglect.

The more the parent's emotional situation is stabilized the more they will be able to concentrate on the education of their child. Now they must be enabled to strengthen the child's skills in the areas of sensomotoric, or perception and of creativeness. They have to learn how to further the emotional development and how to increase the knowledge about the social and material circumstances which are important for the child. They must be enabled to strengthen the development of language and speech. In order to become able to handle all these tasks the parents have to learn special communication strategies concerning linguistic and nonverbal communication. Thus there is a lot to learn for the parents of a hard of hearing child and they will succeed very differently. The person who is responsible for the parents' consultation has to find out the abilities and the limits not only of the handicapped child but also of his parents. Only well trained persons can fulfill this task. Of course he cannot be an expert in all fields he is confronted with when consulting the parents, but he has to be able to identify the problems and has at least to know who can help to manage them. I think family counseling should be done mainly by one person who is responsible and has an insight in the family's situation. He should be the contact person for the family.

In Germany children from an age of $3\frac{1}{2}$ years can be enrolled in a nursery school. This means in the overwhelming majority that they attend a special nursery school for hard of hearing or for hearing impaired. Mainstreaming is tried in very few cases and is not accepted by the teachers of the hard of hearing as the more successful alternative. The education program of the home training is carried on in the nursery schools in its various

forms. Moreover the children have to adopt social abilities as f.i. playing with playmates, observing rules, paying attention to things or procedures for increasing periods of time, thinking. The children have to develop abilities of self-reliance and purposeful behaviour. The development of language competency has to be promoted. These aims are just the same as they are valid in the education of all children, may they be handicapped or not. Educating hard of hearing children it is much more difficult to attain them and it needs special methods.

The methods in use to promote language development are very different. Sometimes it is tried to imitate the normal language development of well hearing children by speaking with the hard of hearing children as much as possible, hoping that they will pick up what they need. Many times language is taught in a more systematical way, using basic linguistic sentence structures and coloured signals to visualize them. Mostly we see a mixture of both methods in nursery schools.

What can the university do to train family counsellors and educators in nursery schools? It could achieve a lot, for in the university there are the scientific resources which are needed for a comprehensive instruction: science of education (here: special education), social sciences, psychology (here: the psychology of human development), medicine (of the throat, nose and ears; audiology), linguistics (psycholinguistics and phonetics). In the Federal Republic of Germany the universities are not active in the field of early education of normal children and very rarely in that of the education of the hard of hearing children. Our universities are only responsible

for teacher training, but they are not training persons doing the education outside the classrooms. These people are trained in so-called "Fachhochschulen fur Soziolpadagogik", which may be traslated as "Colleges of social paedagogics." These colleges do not offer a special training which meets the unique needs of hard of hearing children of an early age. The educators working in nursery schools realise that they need such a special training. So they founded a study group that has worked on a special training program recently. It was developed in Hamburg by members of the university, of the college and of the educators group. It has not been applied until now.

Preschool education is a very important field of special education. Concerning the hard of hearing, one of its main difficulties is the diagnosis of the educational needs. The handicap seems to be much less serious than f.i. deafness. Its detrimental influence on the education is more hidden. The problems that are to be dealt with are problems of education above all, and thus anybody who tries to work in this field has to be an expert in education. Besides this he has to know a lot concerning all the topics mentioned above. The best help a hard of hearing child of early age can obtain is to be supported in its development by such a well trained expert.